

Archbishop Gregory: Offensive speech, actions a ‘growing plague’ that ‘must end’

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Washington Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory said recent public comments by President Donald Trump and others about Baltimore and the responses those remarks have generated “have deepened divisions and diminished our national life.”

“We must all take responsibility to reject language that ridicules, condemns, or vilifies another person because of their race, religion, gender, age, culture or ethnic background,” the archbishop said. “Such discourse has no place on the lips of those who confess Christ or who claim to be civilized members of society. justice for all.”

The archbishop made the remarks in a Q-and-A with the Catholic Standard, Washington’s archdiocesan newspaper. The full text of the questions and his responses, published Aug. 1, follow:

Q: What is your reaction to the controversy over President Trump’s tweets on some members of Congress, deploring Baltimore and related matters?

A: In my brief time in Washington, I have been doing a lot of listening and learning. I have promised to try to preach the Gospel, tell the truth and attempt to heal wounds in the body of Christ and our broader community. I have stressed that I am a pastor and fellow disciple of Jesus, not a political leader.

There are, however, sometimes, when a pastor and a disciple of Jesus is called to speak out to defend the dignity of all God’s children.

I fear that recent public comments by our president and others and the responses they have generated, have deepened divisions and diminished our national life. In particular, I join my brother Archbishop William Lori in sadness and deep regret for the ways our Maryland neighbors in Baltimore have been denigrated in recent public attacks.

Our faith teaches us that respect for people of every race, religion, gender, ethnicity and background are requirements of fundamental human dignity and basic decency. This include newcomers to our country, people who have differing political views and people who may be different from us. Comments which dismiss, demean or demonize any of God's children are destructive of the common good and a denial of our national pledge of "liberty and justice for all."

Q: What can we do about this kind of rhetoric or divisions?

A: I have recently met with leaders of the Knights of Columbus and many lay ecclesial movements in the Archdiocese. We discussed what we can do together to advance our Gospel mission. I encouraged them and their members to seek to promote respect for all, the common good and humble dialogue in a time of growing and destructive divisions. This request builds on the good work and outstanding service of the Knights and these exemplary lay movements in our family of faith and our Washington community. I asked their help in lifting up and defending the dignity of every person, promoting respect, civility and principled discussion of what unites us and where we may differ. We all need to reject racism, disrespect or brutality in speech and action.

I believe the recent pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops on racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts" which points out that racism occurs when we ignore "the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God, when this truth is ignored, the consequence is prejudice and fear of the other, and — all too often — hatred."

I want to share this appeal with all of the faithful of this local church and with our neighbors in this community we share. We must all take responsibility to reject language that ridicules, condemns, or vilifies another person because of their race, religion, gender, age, culture or ethnic background. Such discourse has no place on the lips of those who confess Christ or who claim to be civilized members of society. Speech that vilifies or denigrates another is a violation of the humanity of the speaker and those to whom it is directed - and deprives each of us of our God-given dignity. We must reclaim, reshape and refocus the national conversation on how we protect and promote the lives and dignity of all, especially, the least of these"

(Matthew 25.)

Q: What is your hope for what can come out of all this?

A: As an American, a Christian, a Catholic pastor, I pray that our president, other national leaders and all Americans will do all we can to respect the dignity of all God's children and nothing to further divide our nation. The growing plague of offense and disrespect in speech and actions must end.

- - -

This story was written by The Catholic Standard, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Washington.

Copyright ©2019 Catholic News Service/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.